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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

## MEMORANDUM

### *The Situation in Vietnam*

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123

23 January 1968

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Information as of 1600  
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HIGHLIGHTS

Communist forces are maneuvering around Khe Sanh although there was little military action in the area during the past 24 hours.

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I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:  
In the Khe Sanh area, two more American jet aircraft were shot down on 22 and 23 January, action elsewhere was relatively light (Paras. 1-2). A North Vietnamese prisoner has provided information on the mission of the 325C Division (Paras. 3-9). Communist forces are preparing for increased military action in the Quang Tin - Quang Nam province area (Paras. 10-14).

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III. Military Developments in North Vietnam:  
There is nothing of significance to report.

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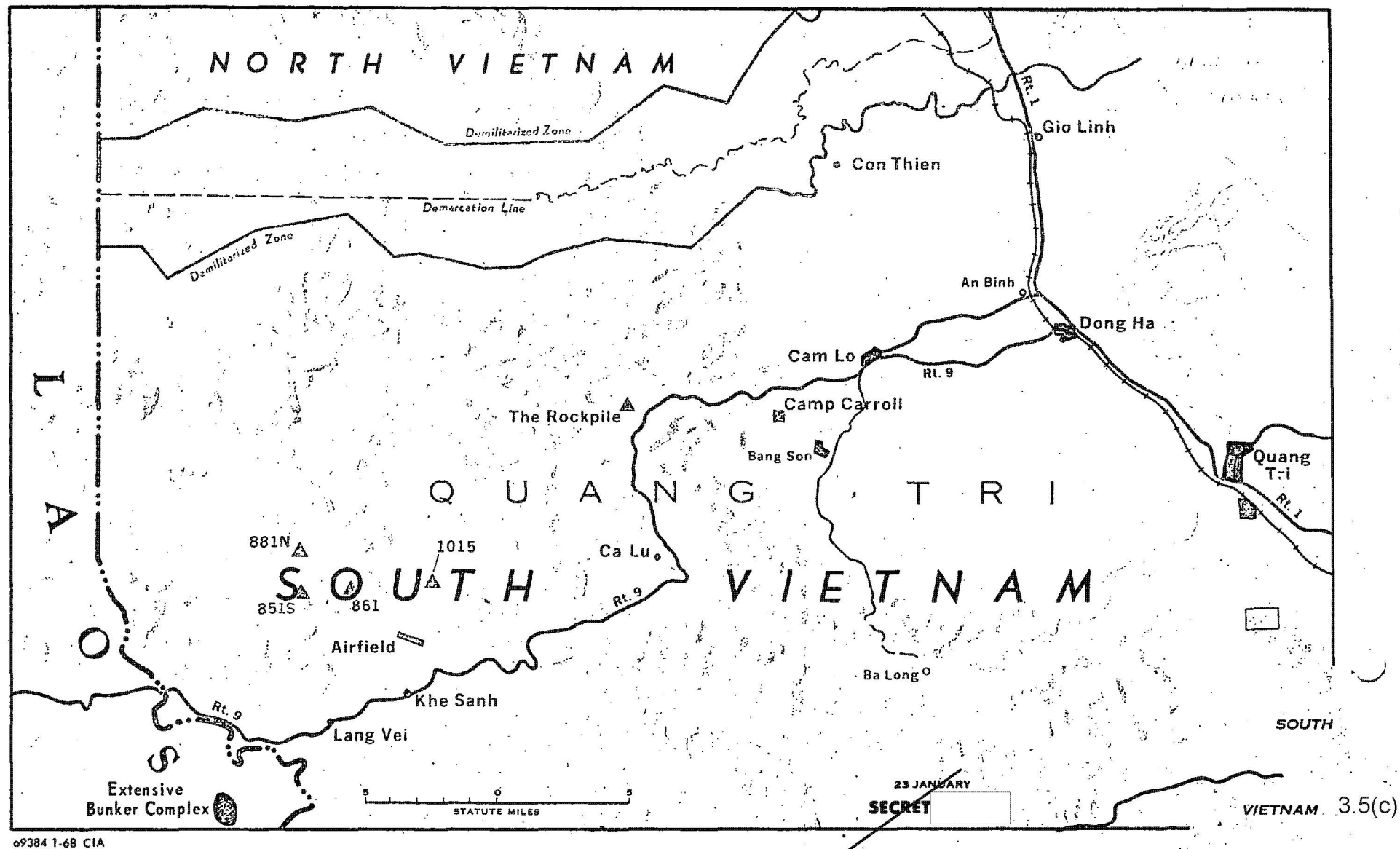
V. Communist Political Developments: The Liberation Front held a central committee conference on 15-17 January (Paras. 1-3).

ANNEX: The Situation in Binh Dinh Province

Steady progress has been made in expanding military security and pacification since 1965. Consolidation and expansion of the gains in the province remain somewhat tenuous, however.

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Two more American jet planes on close support missions near Khe Sanh were shot down on 22 and 23 January, bringing to eight the number of aircraft lost in the area during the past week. The type of enemy fire responsible for these losses is not known, but the Communists evidently have made significant improvements in their antiaircraft capability in the area.

2. There have been no new reports of ground fighting in the Khe Sanh area, but sporadic enemy shelling continues in the mountains north of the base and at Con Thien in eastern Quang Tri Province. The heaviest action reported on 22 January was southeast of Quang Tri city where newly arrived US Army units reported killing 52 Communists. Two battalions of the US 1st Air Cavalry Division have been moved up to this area from Binh Dinh Province, releasing another US Marine battalion for deployment farther north.

North Vietnamese 325th Division

3. A North Vietnamese Army deserter who turned himself in at the Khe Sanh Airfield on 20 January states that his unit, the 325C Division, has been ordered to overrun every US base between the Laotian border and Con Thien before Tet (30 January).

4. The deserter indicated that he and other North Vietnamese troops had been told that they would go on to "liberate" Quang Tri Province, thereby winning a powerful negotiating position for the Communists. The Quang Tri campaign was so important, he said, that it was being controlled directly by the North Vietnamese Defense Ministry in Hanoi.

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5. North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam's northern I Corps area have been given equally ambitious missions in the past. During the fighting along the Demilitarized Zone last summer, prisoners from the North Vietnamese 324B Division stated that they had orders to seize control of both Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces.

6. The present situation in northern I Corps, however, is markedly different from that of a year ago. In 1967, the North Vietnamese committed two divisions, the 324B and the 325th, in the Demilitarized Zone area. This year, with the apparent arrival of the 304th and 320th divisions in the western and north central parts of Quang Tri Province and with the infiltration of sizable additional forces into positions along the northern coast, probably for diversionary attacks, the Communists have significantly increased their capabilities.

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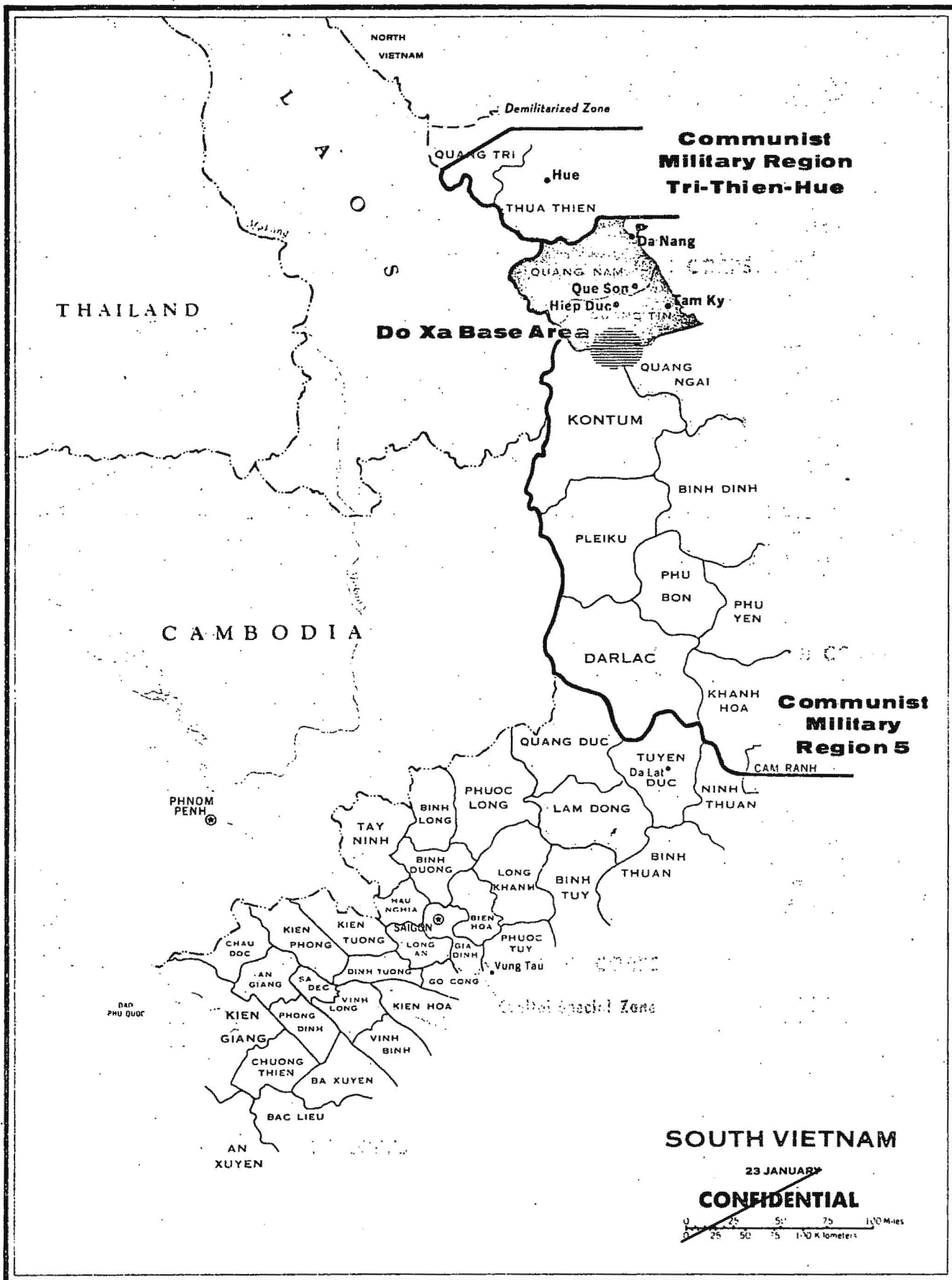
8. The North Vietnamese infantryman who deserted at Khe Sanh went into some detail on the tactics which the 325th Division is to use in attacking that base. He states that two battalions of the 95C Regiment will attack US Marine positions on hills 861 and 1015 overlooking Khe Sanh from the north. Hill 1015 would then be used as an anti-aircraft position against aerial resupply and reinforcement operations. Concurrently, the 95C Regiment's

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third battalion and the entire 101D Regiment would assault the Khe Sanh Airfield. The 101D Regiment, according to the deserter, is now located in the jungle immediately south of the airfield. The deserter did not know the location of the 325th Division's 29th Regiment, but he claimed that it was being held in reserve and presumably would also participate in the Khe Sanh campaign.

9. In another development, allied guerrilla teams on reconnaissance patrols in Laos just over the border west of Khe Sanh reported discovering a complex of several hundred fortified positions. The patrols also found a large command bunker, caves containing large quantities of rice, and a hut with a long antenna wire set up next to it, indicating that the area is a major North Vietnamese combat staging base.

#### Enemy Moves in Quang Tin - Quang Nam Provinces

10. The movements of Communist elements in the central portion of South Vietnam's I Corps suggest the enemy may be preparing for intensified military action near the coast in Quang Tin and Quang Nam provinces.

11. The recent northward shift of headquarters elements of the Communist Military Region 5 from their traditional operating positions in their Do Xa Base area suggests renewed enemy emphasis on the strategic coastal lowlands between Da Nang and Tam Ky. This repositioning included four major control elements of Military Region 5 as well as the rear services unit. In the past two months there has been a clustering of as yet unidentified radio terminals, which probably represent some of these units, in the mountainous areas some 35 miles due west of Tam Ky.

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12. Subordinate elements of the North Vietnamese 2nd Division, in close coordination with Viet Cong local forces, have been preparing for future military action. All major elements of the 2nd Division have recently been pinpointed in the Hiep Duc - Que Son area except for the 21st Regiment. This regiment just moved to a position some six miles southwest of Tam Ky and reportedly is poised for a large-scale assault on the provincial capital itself.

13. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] a deserter from the North Vietnamese 31st Regiment, which arrived in Quang Nam Province in mid-December, stated that the regiment will attack targets in the Quang Tin - Quang Nam province border area after Tet.

14. This increase in enemy activity further indicates that the Communist main forces together with local force units in this area are determined to initiate offensive action in central I Corps. Such an offensive may take place in conjunction with increased enemy military activity in the Hue area and possibly as part of a countrywide series of large-scale actions just preceding or closely following the Tet holiday.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. There is nothing of significance to report.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Liberation Front central committee held a conference on 15-17 January, probably in order to transmit Hanoi's decisions on plans and strategy for 1968 to the Front elite. As usual, however, the formal communiqué of the conference reveals little of the actual substance of the meeting. Major speeches by military commander Tran Nam Trung and Secretary General Huynh Tan Phat have been given routine propaganda treatment. In his military talk, Trung emphasized Viet Cong attacks which would inflict maximum personnel losses on the Americans, and he urged his military comrades to take steps to improve the Viet Cong in both quality and quantity. Huynh Tan Phat urged the political cadres to continue to promote unrest in the cities. In an obvious effort to take some credit for recent strikes in Saigon, the communiqué singled out this kind of defiance of the Saigon government as an example of the kind of dissidence the Communists should promote in other urban areas.

2. The communiqué stressed claims that the new Front political platform was receiving "warm welcome and support" throughout the world and emphasized the forthcoming Tet cease-fire. The Communists apparently see some propaganda advantage in contrasting their proposed seven-day stand-down with Saigon's more limited 36-hour cease-fire.

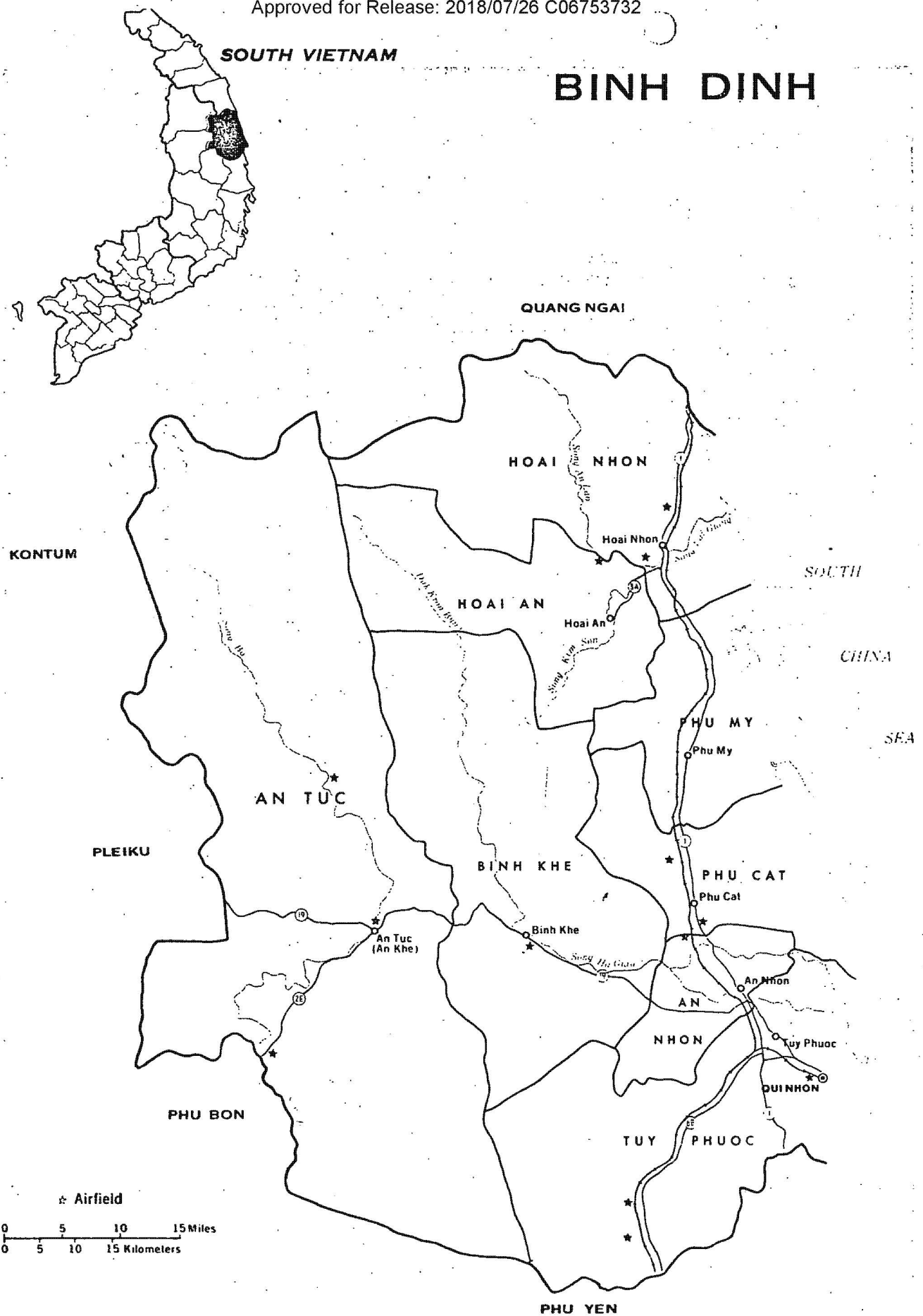
3. Enlarged Front conferences have occasionally in the past followed important Hanoi party meetings at which new guidelines for Communist policy in the immediate future were laid down. Although the public communiqués of such conferences seldom reveal the more important and secret decisions, benchmark changes in Communist policy can frequently be traced to such gatherings. The recent North Vietnamese decision to make a semantic change in its offer to talk with the US, for example, was probably thrashed out in a year-end party meeting in Hanoi. Hanoi's motives in taking this new initiative together with decisions on accompanying military strategy for the next few months were probably thoroughly explained to Front members at the mid-January meeting.

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ANNEXSituation in Binh Dinh ProvinceSUMMARY

Slow but steady progress has been made in expanding military security and pacification in Binh Dinh Province since 1965. The continued viability of enemy forces, however, has rendered the consolidation and expansion of the gains in Binh Dinh somewhat tenuous.

The Communists have, in fact, become more aggressive although they appear to lack the assets to score any dramatic successes in their winter-spring campaign in the province. The declining Viet Cong control in some of Binh Dinh's populous coastal districts is borne out by the findings of the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). The RD cadre programs have been generally effective in reducing Viet Cong domination in these districts and in extending government influence into the countryside. Since mid-1967, however, a distinct slowdown in the over-all progress of Binh Dinh provincial activities has been noted. The reduced government momentum appears to be a result of increased enemy aggressiveness, inertia associated with the change of national governments, and to a wholesale purge of provincial officials for corruption.

1. Slow but steady progress in expanding military security and pacification marked the Vietnamese and allied effort in Binh Dinh Province from July 1965--the high water mark of Communist success--through at least mid-1967. Reassertion of government control and influence has not been achieved

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5. The number of South Vietnamese troops under arms in Binh Dinh currently stands at about 27,000. In order to maintain an offensive posture and to provide security for allied installations and areas under government control or development, the efforts of about 59,000 additional US and third country soldiers are required. This gives the allies roughly a six to one advantage over the enemy forces.

6. By early 1967, allied forces had largely pushed the enemy from Binh Dinh's populous coastal areas into the highlands and restricted his access to the human and material resources in the lowlands. Captured documents and other reports indicate that, as a result, the Communist Party-National Liberation Front infrastructure in Tuy Phuoc, An Nhon, and Binh Khe districts became fragmented and that large numbers of low-level cadres were disillusioned. The high rate of enemy returnees in late 1966 - early 1967 attested to declining enemy morale.

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7. [ ] early 1967 continues to reflect shortages of food, medicine, and manpower in enemy units throughout Binh Dinh Province. A recently captured enemy document indicates that the guerrilla strength in Hoai Nhon District--where Operation PERSHING has been underway since February 1967--declined by 30 percent from March to September 1967, and that there were virtually no secret guerrillas in the portions of the district under South Vietnamese Government control. Another enemy document stated that during this same period, two provincial sapper companies, apparently operating in Hoai Nhon, were "decimated" by allied forces.

#### Shifts in Enemy Tactics

8. There are indications that the enemy has adjusted his tactics over the past year in an effort to cope with the presence of large allied forces. In addition to maintaining a main force presence, the Communists have given increased emphasis to guerrilla and sapper tactics. These tactics are designed to inflict heavier

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without heavy fighting, considerable cost in casualties to allied forces, and severe dislocation problems for Binh Dinh's residents. The continued viability of enemy military forces in the area, moreover, has rendered the consolidation and expansion of the gains in Binh Dinh somewhat tenuous. This has been especially evident since the summer of 1967.

2. Although security is a prerequisite for initial pacification success, the preservation and expansion of pacified areas depends to a large measure upon the ability of the South Vietnamese to establish a viable political base and obtain some degree of popular support. In this latter category, and in its ability to provide a positive alternative to the influence of the Communists and their National Liberation Front, the South Vietnamese Government has scored its least success in Binh Dinh.

#### Military Situation

3. Binh Dinh, with about 913,000 residents, is the second most populous province in South Vietnam. For socioeconomic and geographic reasons, both the Communists and the allies give the province a very high priority in their planning.

4. Communist strength in Binh Dinh, according to MACV's order of battle holdings, numbers around 15,000. These forces include the 3rd North Vietnamese Army Division, three provincial battalions, about 15 provincial and district companies, and approximately 7,200 guerrillas. Over the past three years such allied operations as MASHER-WHITE, IRVING, THAYER, and PERSHING have inflicted severe casualties upon enemy forces. Although these enemy forces have probably declined in numbers and quality during this time, the Communists have shown surprising resilience and, through both local recruiting and infiltration from North Vietnam, they have been able to maintain a significant military threat in Binh Dinh. This in turn forces the continued deployment there of large numbers of allied soldiers.

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casualties upon friendly forces at a greatly reduced risk to enemy troops and, at the same time to undercut South Vietnamese pacification operations.

9. During mid-1967 enemy forces in Binh Dinh, as elsewhere in coastal II Corps, adopted the tactic of moving into relatively secure village and hamlet complexes and forcing allied forces to ferret them out. Through this technique, the enemy apparently sought to destroy the popular confidence in the government's ability to prevent Viet Cong incursions. Such incidents often resulted in civilian casualties and property damage. This activity has probably had some adverse effect on the inhabitants' morale.

10. After apparently devoting their efforts in early fall 1967 mainly to building up their economic base through rice and tax collections and to harassment and propaganda activities, the Communists in Binh Dinh began in late November their winter-spring campaign. As elsewhere in the country the tempo of their military activities was stepped up and multi-company attacks were launched in Hoai Nhon and Phu Cat districts.

11. There are strong indications, however, including evidence from captured enemy documents, that the Communists in Binh Dinh lack the capability to match the aggressiveness of their winter-spring offensive in some other areas. A document recently captured in Hoai Nhon District implies that the enemy, at least in this area, needs time to consolidate his organizations and establish intelligence assets in refugee camps and other allied installations. It indicates that, until March, Communist troops in the district will try to place allied forces on the defensive by using guerrilla and sapper tactics and will attempt to reduce allied mobility by cutting lines of communication and intensifying antiaircraft fire. At the same time, Viet Cong personnel are to concentrate on propagandizing the populace,

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and on other activities such as rice collection and bond sales to raise funds.

12. Another document dated 19 October 1967 and emanating from the Viet Cong provincial headquarters in Binh Dinh stated that, although the main and local forces and guerrillas had conducted numerous attacks in the Phu My and Van Canh areas, enemy units in Phu Cat, Binh Khe, and Hoai An districts were not strong enough to "accomplish the desired results." Enemy objectives in the winter-spring campaign, according to this document, include the cutting of Routes 1, 9, and 6B, and attacks on RD and government administrative cadres as well as South Vietnamese security forces. The document implies that the Viet Cong need to establish more effective operational bases in the province's urban areas and exhorts all personnel to increase food production and accelerate recruitment.

\_\_\_\_\_ enemy efforts to recruit youths from 13 to 15 years of age and women, into informant networks, guerrilla forces and, in some cases, district units.

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#### Pacification

13. Declining Viet Cong influence in some of Binh Dinh's coastal districts is borne out by the findings of the Hamlet Evaluation System (HES). The HES scoring for October 1967 places almost all of the hamlets in Tuy Phuoc, An Nhon, and Phu Cat districts in the B, C, or D categories;\* most of the B hamlets are located in Tuy Phuoc, the district surrounding the provincial capital of Qui Nhon.

14. Despite the control which the Viet Cong are believed to exert over most of Binh Khe and An Tuc districts, the HES findings indicate

*\*A, B, and C hamlets are considered generally secure; the D and E hamlets are considered contested.*

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that the hamlets in these districts--which are in the sparsely populated, rugged terrain of western Binh Dinh--fall primarily into the B and C categories. The reason for this is that the population in these highland districts is apparently clustered around a few allied strong-points, such as An Khe. In populous coastal Phu My District about half the hamlets are rated as C, D, or E; the remaining half are Viet Cong controlled. Viet Cong dominated hamlets constitute over half the hamlets in Hoai Nhon and Hoai An districts.

15. A provincial aggregate of the HES findings for October indicates that, of the 690 hamlets recorded in Binh Dinh, about 170, or 24 percent, are Viet Cong controlled. HES places the population under Viet Cong influence at approximately 142,000; however, the population of about 93 of the 170 enemy held hamlets has not been ascertained. About 45 percent of the province's hamlets are in the secure categories, indicating that the government provides at least some degree of continuing security and administrative control over 311 hamlets and around 453,000 people. The secured population jumps to 635,000 if the non-hamlet population is added to the secure category. There are about 117,000 people in the 103 hamlets in the D and E hamlet categories, and about 19,000 people in the 106 hamlets in the "other" category--nonevaluated, abandoned, or planned hamlets.

16. The Revolutionary Development Cadre programs in Binh Dinh have been generally effective in extending government influence into the villages and hamlets. The RD cadre program was concentrated in Tuy Phuoc, An Nhon, and Binh Khe districts during 1966 and was extended to Phu Cat District in 1967.

17. In late 1966 and early 1967, allied military successes opened up more areas for pacification than had been expected. Under the aegis of the Vietnamese Army's 22nd Division, special teams made up of Regional and Popular Forces soldiers and government technical service representatives were hastily organized to assist in hamlet pacification and security until more RD cadre teams could

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be recruited and trained. At present there are some 32 such teams which operate almost exclusively in Phu My District.

18. In addition to the 32 civil military teams in Binh Dinh, there were as of 1 December 46 Vietnamese RD teams, four Truong Son (montagnard) RD teams, and 200 Static Census Grievance Cadres--who work primarily in secure hamlets--for a total of 2,846 RD cadres. In the five districts where the programs have been active, the hamlets developed by the teams have generally been astride the axis of Routes 1 and 19.

19. During 1966, 63 hamlets were constructed and 12 were consolidated by the RD teams in the districts of Tuy Phuoc, An Nhon, and Binh Khe. These totals represent over 100 percent of the cadre hamlet pacification goal set for 1966. During 1967, a goal of 78 additional pacified hamlets was set for these three districts. Additionally, in Phu Cat District, it was determined that 86 hamlets required pacification. About half these hamlets were to have been developed by the RD teams by the close of the 1967 program.

20. For a variety of reasons such as the late start in 1967, the disruptions from the Lunar New Year holidays, and the various elections, the RD team program in Binh Dinh as elsewhere in South Vietnam is behind schedule. Preliminary assessments suggest, however, that the bulk of the 1967 program may be completed by late January or February.

21. By 1 October 1967, 35 RD teams had moved to the second of the two hamlets they were to work during the year. US advisers believe that they could have been in new hamlets before the end of July, but their move was delayed by apparent administrative snags. The 22nd Division, which had the responsibility for certifying the completed hamlets, did not begin its inspection until late June. The inspection once begun, proceeded slowly, and after its completion there were additional delays in reaching a decision as to when the teams should move. For almost two months many teams remained idle.

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22. The civil-military teams in Phu My district were scheduled to consolidate 24 hamlets during 1967 and, at least as of October, were on schedule.

23. A distinct slowdown in the over-all progress of Binh Dinh provincial activities has been noted since mid-1967. For example, according to US advisers, the RD cadre program had by late September "come almost to a halt." The reduced pace of the government's provincial activities appears to have been caused by increased enemy aggressiveness, the inertia associated with the impending change of national governments, and to a wholesale purge of provincial officials for corruption. Recent government investigation has uncovered gross malfeasance by a large number of local officials in Binh Dinh, profiting from the immense inflow of supplies and funds now supporting the large allied war effort in II Corps. In the course of this anticorruption drive, the provincial RD cadre chief, reported to be a capable and apparently honest official, was removed from his post and transferred to another province. This internal shake-up--especially the loss of the cadre chief--may have an adverse effect on the cadre program.

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